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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000002

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: GAZA ROUND-UP: DECEMBER 31

Classified by Pol-Econ Counselor Catherine Hill-Herndon for reasons 1.4 (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Arab League ministerial went into closed session at 1:00pm local time and as of 6:00 pm local time we have not gotten any comment on the status of the talks, either from the Egyptians or other delegations. Egypt closed and evacuated the Rafah terminal several times overnight in advance of Israeli air attacks, but continues to open on a limited basis to received injuries Palestinians and allow assistance through. Protests in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt continue, with a heavy security presence keeping numbers down and preventing demonstrators from reaching the Arab League. The press continues to report on external critics of Egypt; the independent press joined the official media in defending the government against anitt-Egyptian rhetoric. TV commentators suggested Egypt is facing two wars -- the Israeli war on the Palestinians and the "dirty media war" again Egypt. Egypt has cancelled several official New Year's activities in solidarity with the Gazans. END
SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) AL Ministerial: The Arab League Ministerial officially began around 1:00 pm today and is still meeting behind closed doors at of 6:00 pm local time. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal delivered a short opening statement, and then gave way to Amr Moussa who delivered a tough and angry speech against the Israeli attacks, while also calling on the Palestinians to overcome their divisions. He criticized Israel for attacking civilians, laying the blame for the current conflict on "the occupation and siege." Moussa said that with if the Palestinians had a "strong resistance or a strong army" the Israeal would not have attacked, citing the October War - "when Syria and Egypt stood together and gained victory" - as an example. He also said that "the weakness and division of Arabs and Palestinians lead to a situation where Arabs are disrespected," calling on the Palestinian factions to "unite and forget their disagreements." Echoing Mubarak's earlier statements, Moussa warned against allowing others to manipulate the situation for their own political gain.

¶3. (SBU) Rafah border: Egyptians closed and evacuated the Rafah terminal several times overnight December 30-31 in advance of Israeli air attacks near the Gaza-Egyptian border. Egypt continues to open the border on a limited basis to receive injured Palestinians and allow humanitarian assistance through. Medical cases, depending on their condition, are being transferred to hospitals in al-Arish, Ismailia, and Cairo.

PROTESTS CONTINUE

¶4. (U) Protestors, including Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members and members of the April 6 Movement, demonstrated December 30 at the Bar Syndicate in downtown Cairo and tried to demonstrate at the Doctors' Syndicate and in Tahrir Square, but police prevented them from demonstrating at the latter two locations and arrested a number of participants. The MB claimed police arrested 45 MB members, but Reuters put the number at 23. Contacts told us of a December 30 demonstration involving a few hundred protestors in Fayoum, south west of Cairo.

¶5. (U) In the early afternoon of December 31, members of the Tagammu and El-Ghad opposition parties and the Kefaya and Revolutionary Socialist opposition movements gathered at Tagammu's downtown headquarters chanting slogans, and preparing to march together to the Arab League Headquarters. However, the police prevented them from moving toward the Arab League headquarters, and arrested approximately 35 demonstrators who tried to reach the Arab League. Police did allow the demonstrators to congregate at the press and bar syndicates nearby in large numbers. The demonstrators and the heavy police presence paralyzed downtown traffic. At the outskirts of Cairo, police prevented approximately 150 opposition demonstrators from reaching the capital to join the protests.

¶6. (C) Demonstrations/Looking Ahead: Contacts speculate there will be many demonstrations following Friday prayers outside mosques throughout Egypt January 2, which police will be unable to prevent. We will monitor the situation closely.

There are unconfirmed rumors that members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) plan to hold marches on Friday, January 2 in support of the GOE's handling of the Gaza crisis. December 31 press reports claimed that the April 6 Movement is calling for a strike in support of

Palestinians in Gaza. However, an April 6 member told us privately on December 31 that such calls for a strike are the uncoordinated efforts of a few April 6 activists. He confirmed that April 6 activists had taken part in most of the demonstrations in Cairo since the December 27 Israeli

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attacks on Gaza.

17. (SBU) GoE Statements: President Mubarak devoted much of his televised New Year's address to the nation on December 30 to the Gaza situation. Mubarak claimed that Egypt exerted "strenuous efforts" over the last six months to maintaining calm in Gaza, reiterated Egypt's "unquestionable support" for the Palestinian cause, and described Egypt's relief efforts, including treating some wounded Palestinians in Egyptian hospitals. Mubarak said that the Rafah crossing will remain closed because of the absence of PA and EU observers, "in violation of the 2005 deal." In an appearance on the Egyptian talk show Italem on December 29, FM Aboul Gheit, apparently in response to the widely circulated pictures of him shaking hands with Israeli FM Livni during their December meeting and the resultant criticism, explained that Mubarak had "summoned" Livni to Cairo because he saw signs of impending Israeli action in Gaza.

MEDIA COVERAGE

8.(U) Official broadcast and print media continue to respond to internal and external critics who change the GOE is not doing enough to support the Palestinians and to restore a ceasefire. Egyptian TV focused on Mubarak's address to defend his decision not to open the Rafah border crossing with Gaza and telephone calls with world leaders (including President Bush), demonstrations in India and the US, its efforts to open the Rafah terminal to wounded Palestinians and for humanitarian supplies, and continuing coverage from Kafr Sheikh, home of the police officer who was killed on Monday. The Kafr Sheikh coverage included "on the street" interviews with local residents who blame Hamas for the death of the officer and the escalation of violence. TV talk shows focused on the "anti-Egyptian" rhetoric in pan-Arab media and the attack on the Egyptian consulate in Yemen. TV commentators suggested Egypt is facing two wars -- the Israeli war on the Palestinians and the "dirty media war" again Egypt.

19. (U) Independent and opposition press also covered Mubarak's speech, some on the front page, and largely joined the official media in defending the GOE from external critics. Commentators in the official media universally echoed Mubarak's key message that Egypt's commitment to the Palestinian people is beyond question. Independent and opposition commentators focused on Egypt's perceived missteps in dealing with the Livni visit, but did not question to underlying GOE position on the Rafah crossing. The non-official press continued to give prominent coverage to the transit of humanitarian aid at the Rafah crossing, demonstration in Egypt and civilian injuries in Gaza. Discussions on Egyptian blogs follow opinions in the independent and official media. One blogger wrote, "it is a strange thing that Gaza is being neglected whereas the focus is on Egypt and its so-called treason." Most official and independent media covered street demonstrations in Egypt and elsewhere.

10. (U) New Year's cancelled: Egypt has also cancelled official New Year's celebrations, including a performance at the Cairo Opera House and a variety to have been hosted by the Ministry of Information on TV in solidarity with Gaza.

SCOBEDY